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SUBJECT: SENEGAL'S FOREIGN MINISTER ON GUINEAN COUP

REF: DAKAR 1442

Classified By: Political Counselor David G. Mosby for reasons 1.5 B/D.

¶11. (C) Summary: On December 30 following a meeting with Charge and Political Counselor, Senegalese Minister of Foreign Affairs Cheikh Tidiane Gadio publicly clarified Senegal's position regarding the recent coup d'etat in Guinea; Gadio stated that Senegal is not supporting a military regime" in Guinea, rather Senegal supports "a democratic transition." Charge met with the Foreign Minister to seek a clarification of Senegal's policy regarding the coup in Guinea as a result of President Abdoulaye Wade's public backing of the military junta. In spite of Wade's remarks, Gadio insisted that the position of Senegal vis-a-vis military coups has not changed and remains in-line with the AU (as he did when demarched by Ambassador regarding troubling remarks on the subject of the Mauritanian coup, reported reftel). However, he explained that Senegal's "vital national security interests" were at stake when coups take place in neighboring countries such as Guinea and Mauritania. Nevertheless, Gadio acknowledged the "difficulty" of Senegal's position and informally requested a letter from Charge requesting clarification of the Senegal's position regarding the Guinean coup in order to help Gadio obtain permission from President Wade to issue a public clarification reiterating Senegal's opposition to coups and support for the African Union (AU) position. Shortly after Charge sent the requested letter, Gadio issued a public statement reiterating Senegal's opposition to coups. (Note: Gadio also briefed Charge on his December 17 visit to Mauritania. Reported septel. End Note.) End summary.

President Wade Expresses Support for Guinean Coup

¶12. (U) During a December 26 press conference at the residence of the Senegalese ambassador to France, President Wade backed the military junta that recently took power in Guinea. According to press reports, Wade said, "I think that this group of soldiers deserves to be supported," following a phone conversation with coup leader Captain Moussa Dadis Camara. The President described Camara as an honest and sincere young man who referred to Wade as "father," going on to say "I call on all countries, the European Union, and in particular France, not to throw stones, but to take this group at their word regarding the organization of elections and the eventual return to civilian control of the country. Wade argued that it is not possible to organize elections in two months as called for by the Guinean constitution, agreeing with what he claimed the military junta stated, that it would take at least eight months. On December 27, Wade sent presidential adviser, Minister-Counselor Ahmed Khalifa Niassé, as his special envoy to the junta. The President also made a plane available to the junta for their

trip to drum up support from the governments of other countries in the region. According to press reports, Wade will travel to Conakry himself on December 31.

Foreign Minister Invokes National Security Interests

¶ 13. (C) On December 26, Charge accompanied by Political Counselor met with Foreign Minister Gadio to seek clarification on President Wade's remarks regarding the Guinean coup. Charge pointed out that the expression of support was at odds with the position of the international community in general and the AU in particular. He noted that a pattern seemed to be emerging given previous comments Wade made which appeared to justify and establish acceptance for the coup in Mauritania and the support Wade showed for Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe in the lead up to and during the African Union/European Union heads of state summit.

¶ 14. (C) Gadio acknowledged frankly the difficulty of the position that Senegal has adopted, saying that he would have "presented this with more nuance." He insisted that Senegal's position was not at odds with that of the AU and that Senegal remains opposed to coups. However, Gadio emphasized that "Guinea is not Zimbabwe. It's not thousands of kilometers away." The Foreign Minister said that Senegal's "vital national security interests" were at stake in neighboring countries such as Guinea and Mauritania, noting that many Senegalese live in or have relatives in these countries. Accordingly, Senegal does not "want to put gasoline on the fire."

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Coup d'Etat Merely Codifies Status Quo Under Conte

¶ 15. (C) Gadio suggested that Guinean opponents of the military junta (and by implication international critics) were being somewhat disingenuous because, according to him, the Guinean military has been in control of the country for the past two years as a result of the long illness of deceased President Lansana Conte. The opponents of the coup who were members of the former president's cabinet and entourage and the Supreme Court should have acted to enforce the constitution and end the power vacuum created by Conte's incapacity. Instead, they sat by and allowed the military to take over because the military is the only functioning government institution in the country.

¶ 16. (C) With regard to the coup itself, Gadio said Senegal would have preferred that the Guinean President of the National Assembly and the Supreme Court had agreed to work with all of the country's institutions and civil society, including the military, to achieve a consensus on how to move forward. Unfortunately, they did nothing, resulting in the military taking the initiative. Gadio went so far as to wonder aloud if the political class not so secretly wanted the military to step in, pointing out that many people had backed the idea of a coup before Conte's death.

Senegal's Position Not Out of Step with AU

¶ 17. (C) While expressing concern about the notion that coup leader Camara would stay in power for two years, Gadio noted that the AU-imposed deadline of six months for the restoration of civilian rule was a tacit acknowledgement of the complexity of the situation, noting that the AU could have chosen two or three months for the deadline, but did not. Gadio said Senegal wants to see a broad-based national consultation in Guinea resulting in a democratic transition.

Comment: Senegal Will Not Stand on Principle with Regard to Coups in Neighboring Countries

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¶8. (C) As its voting record in the UN Human Rights Council and former UN Human Rights Commission demonstrate, Senegal is almost always reluctant to directly condemn or single out any country for criticism for reasons of democratic principle or human rights (with the notable exception of Israel).

Instead, Senegal prefers to support broad principles in general, but rely on engagement and compromise in specific cases. Nevertheless, while Foreign Minister Gadio was clearly embarrassed by the lack of nuance in President Wade's remarks, he made clear that Senegal could not, in his mind, afford to stand on principal with regard to coups in neighboring countries. According to local political observers the positions President Wade has taken vis-a-vis the coups in both Mauritania and Guinea are supported by the Senegalese people who are wary of potential conflict with neighbors. Moreover, during his time in office, Wade has demonstrated that he is at heart a political and diplomatic pragmatist who is willing to befriend and trade with any country or regime no matter how unsavory including not only rogues such as Iran, but also true pariah states such as North Korea, which is building Wade's massive Stalin-esque monument in Dakar in exchange for USD 25 million in real-estate. Gadio's protestations notwithstanding, Senegal's opposition to coups is rhetorical at best.

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